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THE MENTAL AND THE PHYSICAL - A REPLY TO DR. MEYNELL

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There are two points which I should like to take up in Dr. Meynell's discussion of my own and Armstrong's versions of psycho-physical materialism.¹

The first point concerns his contention that it is a fatal objection to both versions of the theory that

to take an example, the belief that my house is falling down might well count as *explanation* of behaviour of mine which would otherwise appear inexplicable; yet it would always *make sense* whatever behaviour was attributed to me, to deny that I had the belief of which such behaviour would be the normal expression (p. 41).

What this argument is supposed to show is that the connection between a man's belief and the behaviour which constitutes an exercise of or an acting on that belief is a contingent relationship and not a logically necessary one as the Rylean dispositional account of belief, to which I subscribe, and the modified version of that account developed by Armstrong would both equally imply.

In developing his argument Meynell is careful not to specify further the 'otherwise inexplicable behaviour' of his which might well be explained in terms of his belief that his house is falling down. If, however, we consider what sort of behaviour this might be, one kind of behaviour that springs readily to mind as a response to the acquisition of the belief that one's house is falling down in the behaviour of shouting 'Look out! the house is falling down' in which the imperative 'Look out!' is combined with an assertion of the proposition 'the house is falling down', i.e. an assertion of the proposition which Dr Meynell in his example is said to believe. Now whatever may be true of other kinds of behaviour such as leaving the house in a hurry which might also be explained in terms of such a belief, it is clear that there is a logical connection *of some kind* between believing that the house is falling down and asserting that the house is falling down. Nevertheless, as Meynell points out, there is no self-contradiction involved in denying that someone who asserted that the house was falling down did so because he believed that the house was falling down. If he asserted that the house was falling down and did not believe that it was, it would be true as a matter of logical necessity that he was lying; but it is never true as a matter of logical necessity that someone who asserts a proposition, must believe the proposition he asserts.

What this shows is that to assert *p* does not entail believing *p*; what it does not show is that there is no kind of logical connection between asserting *p* and believing *p*. In particular it does not show that the reverse entailment whereby believing *p* entails at least under some circumstances asserting or assenting to *p* does not hold; and it is this entailment from believing *p* to asserting *p* rather than that from asserting *p* to believing *p* which is implied by dispositional theories

¹Hugo Meynell, 'The Mental and Physical', *The Heythrop Journal*, XIV (1973), pp. 35-46.

such as those which Meynell is criticising. It is true that there is no self-contradiction in supposing that someone believed that the house was falling down without ever asserting that it was; but it would, surely, be self-contradictory to say of someone that he believed the house was falling down, but would never under any circumstances have had the slightest temptation to assert that it was.

I conclude, therefore, that Meynell's argument does not show what it is presumably intended to show, namely that there is no logical connection between believing and any kind of objectively observable behaviour which is or would under certain circumstances be exhibited by the believer. I am puzzled, however, by the parallel Meynell claims to perceive in this connection between the familiar puzzle about induction in which we apparently infer from observed instances of the conjunction between two events to the universal conclusion that whenever event A occurs, event B invariably follows. The suggestion apparently is that there is a similarly invalid inference involved in arguing from observed behaviour to the underlying beliefs can never be a valid inference in the strict logical sense; nor would I deny that there is a parallel here with the standard case of so-called inductive inference. What I fail to understand is the point that Meynell is trying to make in drawing this parallel. For the point about the invalidity of the inductive inference is not, as Meynell seems to think, that there is no logical connection between observed conjunctions of an event of type A with an event of type B and the universal law that whenever an A occurs, a B follows. It is simply that the universal law entails the particular instances that fall under it and not vice versa, which is precisely the direction of entailment between a belief and such behaviour as asserting or assenting to the proposition believed which is postulated on the dispositional theory of belief.

Meynell seems to be confusing the kind of logical relationship that exists between a hypothetical universal law and the instances that fall under it and Hume's point that in a causal relationship the mere assertion of the occurrence of an event of the cause type does not entail the occurrence of an event of the effect type, nor does an assertion of the occurrence of an event of the effect type entail the antecedent occurrence of an event of the cause type. The point is that there are two distinct kinds of inference that we commonly make, neither of which, as they stand, are valid deductive inferences. The one is the inductive inference from the observed instance to the universal law and the other is the inference from an observed event to its effect which has not yet occurred or from an observed event to its unobserved antecedent cause. These two inferences are different in that in the inductive case there is no conceivable additional premise which can be introduced in order to make the inductive argument into a valid deductive argument; nevertheless a valid deductive argument can always be generated from an inductive inference simply by inverting the direction of entailment, that is by taking the universal law as a premise or axiom and deducing the particular instances from it in conjunction with further premises describing the conditions obtaining prior to the occurrence in question. In the inference from cause to effect or from effect to cause, on the other hand, the inference is equally invalid in whichever direction the inference proceeds; but in this case it is always possible to generate a valid deductive argument simply by assuming the same universal law as constitutes the so-called 'conclusion' of the corresponding inductive inference.

In terms of this analysis, the fact that there appears to be a logical connection between a belief and such observable behaviour as the assertion of the proposition believed, such that the hypothesis that X

believes *p* entails that under certain circumstances *X* would assert or assent to *p* but not *vice versa*, suggest that when we infer from what someone says to what he believes we are arguing inductively from the observed instances to a universal law under which the instances fall and not as might otherwise be supposed from an effect back to its cause. This, of course, is precisely the view for which Ryle has argued when he maintains² that dispositional words like 'believe' are used to state laws rather than to report facts of occurrences. It is also, I would suggest, an important part of the justification for the view that the reasons a man has for acting as he does, i.e., his beliefs and desires, are not in any ordinary sense the causes of his behaviour.

While I would not wish to claim that there is no problem about the 'intentionality' of mental entities for the form of psycho-physical materialism to which I subscribe, I cannot see that Meynell is justified in claiming, as he does, that in the light of this argument both theories (i.e., Armstrong's and my own) have 'foundered on the fact of the intentionality of mental entities'. (p.41). Indeed it is far from clear to me that considerations relating to the intentionality of mental concepts like 'belief' affect the argument we have been examining. For it is not difficult to construct an argument exactly parallel to the one Meynell employs in which we substitute a non-intentional dispositional concept (the concept 'unstable') for the intentional dispositional concept 'believing that his house is falling down' in the argument thus:

The instability of Meynell's house might well count as explanation of its falling down which would otherwise seem inexplicable; yet it would always make sense, if it did fall down, to deny that it was unstable.

The second point in Meynell's paper which I should like to take up relates to his remarks about what he calls 'conscious acts' (pp. 45-6) or, as I prefer to call them, 'mental acts' or 'mental events' and my alleged neglect of these in my account of the mind-brain, mind-body relationship. By mental or conscious acts I understand those occurrences which are referred to by such verbs as 'seeing', 'hearing', 'noticing', 'perceiving', 'recognising', 'recollecting', 'realising', 'grasping', 'understanding' (in some of its uses), 'judging', 'concluding', 'inferring' and 'deciding'. These are all what Ryle³ has called 'achievement verbs'. They all share the common characteristic of referring to an event that occurs at a particular moment of time, but which, like processes and unlike instantaneous events, are extended in time but unlike processes cannot be said to be occurring at any time during the period over which they apply. As I have observed elsewhere, 'any process like any state' entails at least two events, its beginning and its end'.⁴ One might add that every instantaneous event is both the end of one state or process and the beginning of another. For example, in Hume's famous case of the billiard balls, when the event of a ball's hitting the cushion occurs, one process (movement towards the cushion) ends and another process (movement away from the cushion) begins. In other cases, as when the ball loses momentum and stops, a process gives way to a state. When the ball is struck by the cue or by another ball, the stationary state gives way to a process of movement, although in such cases our attention is more commonly focused on the transformation of the process whereby the cue moves towards the ball into the process of movement in the ball itself. Changes from one state to another without an

²The Concept of Mind (London, 1949), ch. V. 2, pp. 120-5.

³The Concept of Mind, ch. V. 5, pp. 149-53.

⁴ U.T. Place, 'Sensation and Processes - a reply to Munsat', Mind LXXXI (1972), pp. 106-12, p. 111.

intervening process, though logically possible, belong to the realm of magic and miracles rather than to reality as we know it in everyday life.

If we examine the mental or conscious acts I have listed, in the light of these distinctions we notice that they are all instantaneous events which constitute the termination or culmination of a mental process or activity and the institution of a new mental state. Thus seeing, in the ordinary visual sense, involves an antecedent mental process of looking and a subsequent and consequent mental state of knowing what it is that is visually present. Hearing involves an antecedent mental process of listening and a subsequent and consequent mental state of knowing what was said or what sort of sound it was. Noticing involves the antecedent mental process of looking, listening or otherwise attending and the subsequent and consequent mental state of knowing that there is something answering to the description in question in one's stimulus field. Perceiving consists in the coming about of the mental state of knowing something as a consequence of a variety of mental processes, all the way from looking, listening or otherwise attending, to thinking, pondering, calculating or even dreaming or day-dreaming. Recognising consists in the acquisition of the mental state of being in a position to impart correct information based on past experience consequent upon the mental process commonly referred to as 'racking one's brains'. Realising involves knowing that what is realised was, is or will be the case as a consequence of almost any kind of antecedent mental process. Grasping or understanding, in the mental act sense of that word, involves the antecedent mental process of either reading what is written or listening to what is said and the consequent mental state of knowing what it means. Judging, concluding and inferring involve the antecedent mental process of thinking, pondering or calculating, and the subsequent and consequent mental state of believing the proposition in question either to be true or at least to be a valid inference from the premises of an argument. Deciding, in the sense in which it means something different from judging or concluding, involves, as a consequence of the same sort of antecedent mental process, the mental state of intending to do something.⁵

What implications does this account of the logic of mental acts have in terms of the form of psycho-physical materialism to which I subscribe? As Dr Meynell points out in his paper, my view differs from that of Armstrong in that I give a different account of mental states from that which I give of mental processes. On my view mental states are conceptually reducible to dispositions to behave in a publicly observable way, whereas I take mental processes to involve, if they do not wholly consist in, private mental occurrences which are conceptually irreducible, but which are, as a matter of contingent fact, materially reducible (i.e. reducible in the way that water is reducible to atoms of hydrogen and oxygen) to certain as yet unidentified patterns of brain activity. Meynell is quite right when he points out that this account, as it stands, says nothing about the status of mental or conscious acts. But if, as I have argued, a mental act is the 'interface' between an antecedent mental process and a consequent and subsequent mental state, it would seem to follow that no separate account of the mental/physical relationship is needed in the case of mental acts. In so far as it involves an antecedent mental process, a mental act involves a conceptually irreducible private occurrence which in all probability is, as a matter of contingent fact, a process in the brain; in so far as it involves a consequent and subsequent mental state it is conceptually

⁵Ryle makes the same point with his distinction between 'task verbs' and 'achievement verbs'; *The Concept of Mind*, ch. V. 5, pp. 151-3.

reducible to the disposition to behave in a variety of publicly observable ways.

This analysis of mental acts also throws light on the paradoxical situation to which Meynell draws attention whereby:

there are some mental states, processes or events which cannot be said to be the objects of experience, at least in quite the usual sense; but of which we can properly be said to be conscious (p. 44).

The point here seems to be that to say that someone is conscious of his own mental states, processes and events is merely to say that he knows that they are the case, are occurring or have just occurred when in fact they are the case, are occurring or have just occurred. It is only in the case of mental processes - and then only in the case of certain mental processes, such as sensations and mental images, sometimes referred to collectively as experiences - that the individual who has them knows that they are going on when they are going on by, in some sense, witnessing or observing the mental process as it occurs. In the case of other mental processes like the mental activities of looking, watching, listening, paying attention and picturing things in the mind's eye, the individual recognizes their occurrence from their effect on the experiences which they control or create. In the case of mental states, if, as I maintain following Ryle, they consist in dispositions to behave in a variety of publicly observable as well as privately witnessable ways and not in any actual occurrence or categorical state present in the here and now, it is hardly surprising that the individual's knowledge that they are the case does not depend on any kind of witnessing, observing or inspecting of the mental state in question, since on this view there is or need be nothing there for him to witness, observe or inspect. This conclusion will only appear paradoxical if we insist on clinging to the empiricist dogma that it is only through some kind of observation that we can come to know any matter of contingent fact. Yet because we can know what our beliefs, desires and intentions are without observing either the beliefs, desires and intentions themselves or the behaviour which constitutes their exercises or expressions, it does not follow that our knowledge of our own mental states is based upon some kind of mysterious and inexplicable transcendental intuition. As I see it, to say that we know or are conscious of what we believe, desire or intend is merely to say we are in a position to give a correct statement of what we believe, desire or intend. Now on the dispositional theory of mental states to believe, desire or intend is to be in a position to say and do certain things under certain circumstances; and among those things that one is in a position to do by virtue of believing, desiring or intending is to specify what it is that one believes, desires or intends. In other words, stating one's beliefs, desires or intentions is one of the characteristic exercises of the dispositions in which the mental states of believing, desiring and intending on this view consist.

From this analysis of the different ways in which we come to know about our own mental processes and mental states respectively it would seem to follow that if, as I have argued, a mental act is the point of intersection between an antecedent mental process and a subsequent and consequent mental state, our knowledge of our own mental acts is based partly on observation of the flow of conscious experience from which we derive our knowledge of the antecedent mental processes and partly on the acquisition of the ability to state what one has come to know, believe, desire or intend which is involved in the acquisition of such a mental state.

Clearly the account I have given is little more than a sketch of the sort of account which I should want to give of conscious acts, as

Meynell calls them, or mental acts, as I prefer to call them. There are many details that need to be filled in and many objections that will need to be met. Nevertheless I hope I have said enough to show that the particular combination of psycho-physical materialism and logical behaviourism to which I subscribe is capable not only of plugging the gap which Meynell quite rightly detects in the story as told hitherto, but also of plugging it in a way which promises to throw some much-needed light on some of the more puzzling and perplexing features of mental life.